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RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 1114
RUEHRC/USDA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC PRIORITY 4195
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 4337
RUEAUSA/HHS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 000510

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FAS FOR ITP/MACKE/THOMAS, CMP/DLP/WETZEL/CLERKIN, FAS/BLEGGI
FAS PASS FSIS AND APHIS
USEU BRUSSELS PASS APHIS/FERNANDEZ
MILAN PLEASE PASS TO TURIN OFFICE

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [ASEC](#) [AMED](#) [CASC](#) [SENV](#) [FAO](#) [WHO](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA - MIGRATORY SWANS TEST POSITIVE
FOR H5N1 IN ITALY

REF: A. UN ROME 000435

- [1](#)B. UN ROME 000464
- [1](#)C. 05 ROME 004188 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)D. 05 ROME 004113 (NOTAL)

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[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Tri-Mission Avian Influenza (AI) Emergency Action Committee (AI-EAC) met on January 20 to review post contingency planning and on February 13 to discuss confirmation by the Ministry of Health February 11-12 that six migratory swans in three southern regions (Puglia, Calabria and Sicily) died from infection by the H5N1 high pathogenic avian influenza. EAC members reviewed the current situation in Italy, assessed the GOI's preparations and response, and reviewed posts' AI education and emergency preparation actions. The EAC concluded that no Italy tripwires have been crossed. Following the January 20 meeting, the Consular Section sent out a warden message. Following the February 13 meeting the Consular Section issued an updated warden message and updated the Mission's web site. On February 13, the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) published a Global Agriculture Information (GAIN) report; and Embassy Rome posted a report on Siprnet. END SUMMARY.

AVIAN INFLUENZA CONFIRMED IN SOUTHERN ITALY

[1](#)2. (U) On February 11, FAS contacted GOI Ministry of Health officials, who confirmed that twenty-one wild migrating swans died in the southern regions of Sicily, Calabria, and Puglia. Five tested positive for the high pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus. Later news reports upped the number of dead swans to twenty-two dead, six testing positive for H5N1. As of February 16, the number of dead swans has climbed to thirty, with eight confirmed dead of AI. The areas affected

are: Comune of Pellaro (Reggio Calabria province); Comune f Pizzo Calabro (Province of Vibo Valenzia); Comune of Manduria (Province of Taranto); Comune of Taormina (Province of Messina, Sicily); and the Comuni of Giarre and Mascali (Province of Catania, Sicily). The press has reported dead birds in other parts of Italy, but test results have not been made public as of February 17.

ONGOING SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL MEASURES

13. (U) Italy's dead swans were collected beginning February 1 as part of ongoing AI surveillance and monitoring measures put into place since August last year (ref D). The positive H5N1 results were not completely unexpected, as Greek authorities had also found the strain in migrating swans. These birds are not usually found this far south, but appear to have been driven out of their usual habitats by the unusually cold weather in northern Europe. The GOI has undertaken surveillance and monitoring since last fall, and the response following the confirmation of the virus in dead swans has been swift. An ordinance issued February 11 established a protection zone for three kilometers (1.2 miles) from any areas where the dead birds were found, as well as a surveillance zone extending in a radius of ten kilometers (six miles). The Ministry's Veterinary Service instituted 100 percent testing of commercial flocks in the three affected regions, and agricultural fairs involving live poultry and hunting of wild birds have been banned. The movement of live poultry in these regions has been banned until flocks are tested and found to be free of the disease. Once the birds have been determined to be disease-free, the meat will be able to move to market. The Italian authorities communicated with the European Commission, which was in agreement that border restrictions were not appropriate.

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14. (U) As of Sunday, February 12, the Ministry of Health established two toll-free numbers for general information and to report sighting dead birds.

GOI EARNS HIGH MARKS FROM FAO FOR RESPONSE

15. (U) On February 12, the Ministry of Health's AI Crisis Unit met, joined by a representative from the Rome-based UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The GOI did not ask for FAO technical assistance (ref A). At a February 14 press conference (ref B), FAO officials commended Italy for taking extremely effective and rapid control measures.

NO EVIDENCE OF H5N1 SPREAD TO DOMESTIC FLOCKS

16. (U) At the FAO press conference, Italian Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Romano Marabelli described ongoing monitoring measures instituted in a series of ordinances last fall, and stated that there is no evidence that the virus has been transmitted to domesticated animals. Minister of Health Francesco Storace has appeared on television several times to reinforce this message and assure the public that poultry meat is safe.

OTHER GOI ACTIONS ON AVIAN INFLUENZA

17. (U) On February 9, the Council of State and the Regions adopted Italy's Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan per WHO 2005 guidelines. It will become official when published in the Official Gazzette. Ref D reports on the draft version. Septel on the final version is forthcoming.

TRI-MISSION RESPONSES:

18. (U) In addition to holding AI-EAC meetings, we have done

the following:

-- The USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) published a Global Agriculture Information (GAIN) report on the appearance of H5N1 high pathogenic AI in migratory swans (February 13).

-- The Regional Medical Officer held a Tri-Mission briefing on AI January 20, and we distributed the RMO's powerpoint presentation to the consulates. We have placed information pamphlets in the Medical Unit.

-- On February 2, after approximately ten starlings were found dead on the Embassy to Italy compound at the end of January, Tri-Mission management issued a notice advising employees how to deal with dead birds found on Mission property, at home, or in the wild.

-- The Consular Section issued a Warden Message on January 27 and updated information on the Embassy website on February 14.

-- The Office of Defense Cooperation participated in the U.S. European Command's (USEUCOM) pandemic influenza planning conference in Stuttgart from January 9-12.

-- Consulate General Milan and Turin Olympic Games Liaison Office participated in a DVC presentation on AI by Denise Guild, the Nurse Practitioner in Turin on February 17.

ECONOMIC IMPACT FELT IMMEDIATELY

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19. (U) Despite FAO's public stance, the Ministry of Health's information campaign, and frequent assurances on the safety of Italian poultry from the Minister himself, the Italian press reports that poultry consumption has dropped from 50 to 70 percent since AI in wild migratory swans was detected. Since October 2005, poultry prices have dipped 35 percent. Industry sources claim the economic damage since the crisis began totals 650 million euro (approximately 780 million dollars), putting at risk 40,000 jobs.
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